



TRAINING DISCIPLES LIFE-ON-LIFE

WALKING WITH CHRISTIANS IN THEIR GOSPEL JOURNEY

RANDY POPE



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Training Disciples Life-on-Life

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Life on Life Ministries

A Ministry of Perimeter Church

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LifeonLife.org

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INTRODUCTION

The fact that you are reading this booklet tells me you have an interest in “discipleship.” I am delighted that you have chosen to check out what has become known as “Life on Life Discipleship.” I truly believe that what is explained in this brief booklet will greatly benefit your efforts to both make and train followers of Christ.

The term “discipleship” is not found in Scripture. However, the word “disciple” is often used. It simply means “follower.” The word “discipleship” has now become an often-used word among Christians – but is used in different ways by different Christians. I personally think it is best used to describe anything God uses to help someone either become a follower of Christ or to grow as a follower. Whether or not this is its best use, this is the way I will use it throughout this booklet.

Most of us would probably agree that it is every believer’s responsibility to be as faithful and effective as possible in both making and training disciples. The question for many of us is, “How do I go about doing this?”

There is a companion booklet to this one which addresses the practice of “making” disciples. It is titled, *Making Disciples Life-on-Life*, and is subtitled, “Walking with non-Christians in their gospel search.” In this booklet we will address the “training” of disciples, which is entitled, *Training Disciples Life-on-Life*, and is subtitled, “Walking with Christians in their gospel journey.” If you are interested in what we believe is the full scope of discipleship, both making and training, I encourage you to read through both booklets.

Over five decades ago, as a fourteen-year-old new Christian, I was invited to be part of a small group of fellow students who would meet together weekly. I had no idea what the young adult leader meant when he invited us to take a journey with him in

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what he called “discipleship.” But over the next two years, I learned not only how to grow in maturity as a Christian, but also how to lead non-Christians into a relationship with Jesus.

Years later, after planting a church and pastoring it for over 42 years, I believe it is safe to say that Perimeter Church throughout most of those years has been best known for its life transforming ministry of discipleship. And it is equally accurate to say that “discipleship” has been the single greatest passion of my personal ministry.

At the time of this writing, I am now beginning my 54th consecutive year of what I call, “laboring in the lives” of a small group of men. Over these years, I have watched countless men mature in their faith and become better equipped for daily life and ministry, then going on to do the same with others. During each of these years, I have personally been blessed, even as an insecure introvert, to lead many people to Christ through life on life relationships.

Most of you do not know me personally, but if you did, you would quickly discover that I am very average when it comes to intellect and natural abilities. I truly believe that if you were to get to know me well, you would become convinced that if I could become effective at discipleship, then you can as well. As you read, it will become apparent that the tools presented are designed for anyone’s use, even those of us who are not naturally extroverts and abundantly gifted. In fact, I am reminded and encouraged by Paul’s word to the church in Corinth when he said, *“And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*

And let me say a word to pastors who are reading this. Regarding our church’s ministry of discipleship, I can say with

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integrity that this is not a one church phenomenon. For the past dozen years or so, we have coached hundreds of churches both nationally and globally. These churches are extremely diverse regarding size, denomination affiliation and theological backgrounds. These churches have the same story to tell as Perimeter. And many of their stories far surpass our own story.

I am personally still learning more each year about both making and training disciples. With the realization that I am still a learner, I would love to share with each of you some of my life learnings. But before I conclude this introduction, I need to close with two personal concerns:

1) That you might mistakenly hear me say that I believe I (or any of the men and women who are part of our Life on Life staff) think we have it all correct, perfectly put together. Nothing could be further from the truth. As you have already heard in this introduction, "discipleship" covers anything and everything we do that truly helps people become followers of Christ and/or advance in their journey of following. We do believe there are certain often neglected biblical principles that make discipleship more effective. Please know we are simply sharing our insights regarding these principles for your consideration.

2) That you might mistakenly hear me say that our model for discipleship is THE model that everyone needs to use. We know that God works through these same principles in many differing expressions. And beyond the principles that Life on Life espouses, there are many different approaches to discipleship that God is richly blessing every day.

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So I hope you find what I share in these booklets to be helpful and know that they are intended to be “first steps.” You can learn more about these and other subjects related to discipleship at lifeonlife.org.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION?

In the introduction, I asserted that the greatest discovery of my 42 years of pastoring a church was that of how to help the people of our church become mature and equipped followers of Christ.

After pastoring my first 7 or 8 years, I found myself locked away at a friend's mountain cabin wrestling with the issues of spiritual formation. I was confused. Our church was being applauded for our rapid growth, numerous conversions, commitment to depth in theological teaching, as well as gospel centeredness, but I knew deep in my spirit that something was missing.

It was one evening in that cabin, sitting for hour after hour asking God what that missing element was, that it hit me – I pictured an archer turning his head away from a targeted wall, wildly shooting the arrow, and then running to the wall with a marker and drawing a circle with the arrow perfectly placed in the center of the circle – and then celebrating his ability to hit a bull's eye.

How ridiculous! In fact, it is as ridiculous as leading a church without the target of ministry being identified. We were being celebrated, not for how well we were hitting the target, but for how far we could shoot the arrow – which was meaningless.

It was at that point that I began asking myself the question, "What is the goal of spiritual formation?"

At first my answer was, "seeing our people come to Christ and then grow in their commitment to Jesus and knowledge of the Word of God." As satisfying as this sounded initially, the longer I pondered this, the more uncomfortable I became. Then it hit me.

I thought, "No, that's not good enough. After coming to faith in Christ, our people need to become mature and equipped."

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I reasoned as follows. If a believer grows in commitment to Jesus and in their knowledge of the Word of God, it does not necessarily guarantee that he or she will become mature, and certainly not equipped. But on the other hand, if someone was truly mature and equipped as a believer, they would by necessity be growing in their commitment to Jesus and knowledge of God's Word. With that, I had now identified our target.

If Christians need to become mature and equipped, it raises the next important question, "What is an adequate description of a mature and equipped follower of Christ?"

Once we can describe the target, we can think about our plan for hitting that target.

**WHAT IS AN ADEQUATE DESCRIPTION OF A MATURE
& EQUIPPED FOLLOWER OF CHRIST?**

As I continued to consider the need for hitting the target of making mature and equipped followers of Christ, a second challenge entered my thinking – “What is a mature and equipped follower of Christ?”

After numerous hours of sitting silently in that mountain home, I began to realize that though these words “mature” and “equipped” occur a number of times in Scripture, the Bible never defines them. However, I assumed with a healthy knowledge of God’s Word, one could adequately compile a description of the characteristics of such a believer based on God’s Word. So I took on that endeavor.

Here is the description I came up with after hours of thought then, and numerous edits since then.

A mature & equipped follower of Christ is someone who:

- 1) is living consistently under the:
control of the Holy Spirit,
the direction of the Word of God,
and the motivation of the love of Christ,
- 2) has discovered, developed and are using their spiritual gifts,
- 3) has learned to effectively share their faith, in a winsomely engaging way,

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- 4) gives evidence of being:
 - a faithful member of God's church,
 - an effective manager of life, relationships and resources,
 - a willing minister to others including "the least of these", and
 - an available messenger to non-Kingdom people, and

- 5) demonstrates a life characterized as:
 - gospel driven,
 - worship focused,
 - morally pure,
 - evangelistically bold,
 - discipleship grounded,
 - family faithful, and
 - socially responsible.

I realize that in reading this description, one might immediately respond asking, "And where is this king or queen of glory?" I would never suggest that such a Christian is "fully" mature or equipped in any of these descriptions. What I am suggesting is that were you or I to say someone is totally void of any one of these descriptions, we would have to conclude this person is not mature and/or equipped. For instance, what if someone met all these descriptions with the exception of living under the control of the Holy Spirit, the direction of the Word of God, etc.? I would have to conclude that this person should not be considered a mature Christian.

Though I realize there is no description that is going to be "the" description or a perfect description, I do believe it gives an adequate enough one to define our target, enabling us to determine how well we are accomplishing the task of hitting our goal.

Now, assuming our goal is to make mature and equipped followers of Christ, and assuming we have arrived at an adequate

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description of such a believer, now there's just one last challenge – figuring out how to hit that target. Little did I realize how difficult that challenge would be.

I was pretty aware of, and our church was practicing, the typical church's plan for helping believers with their spiritual formation. But I had to honestly evaluate whether that plan was working.

So what is the typical plan used by churches? I will address that in the next chapter as well as why this plan is not working.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S TYPICAL PLAN FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION, AND IS IT WORKING?

That night in the mountain home, I knew we were failing to hit that target of making mature and equipped followers of Christ. In my best estimation, (and that's all that it was), I knew that my description of a mature and equipped follower of Christ would apply to a small minority of our church members. But oddly enough, I would assume a good majority of our people were growing in their commitment to Jesus and in their knowledge of God's Word.

I look back now and understand why that was the case. It was because I was utilizing the typical church's plan for spiritual formation. And I have grown more convinced, year in and year out, that the present day church (for the most part) has embraced an ineffective plan for making and training disciples.

In the early years of our church, we were using that same plan. That plan, put simply, is giving God's people biblical directives and then challenging them to follow (or obey).

I vividly remember meeting with a dozen or so of the most noted and respected pastors in America. Several of their names you would readily recognize were I to mention them. These guys were approximately my age and as young pastors then, were pastoring some of the most noted and respected churches in America. We met together periodically for 2 or 3 days to discuss common topics of interest. It was our practice, day one, to contribute topics for discussion. My requested subject at this particular gathering was (as you might guess), "How do we take people to spiritual formation?"

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The most noted and respected pastor of the group had summoned us to meet and was therefore hosting and moderating the meeting. His plan was to first “prime the pump” giving his thoughts and then to open the floor for discussion on each subject. He planned our agenda & our subjects in priority for discussion. I was interested to see that my subject was last on a list of about 20.

In the last hour of our final day, we came to my requested topic and I vividly remember his comments.

They were something like this: “You notice I’ve held this one as the last subject. The reason is because I’m not sure what to say about this one” (which was the first and only time that had happened). He went on to say: “How do you help God’s people develop in strong spiritual formation in today’s culture? Today, if you can get your people to worship weekly, share their faith and volunteer to serve, that’s about the best you can do.”

As he continued sharing his thoughts, he asked an interesting question. “How many of you guys had a spiritual mentor in your life who was like a loving drill sergeant or coach in your life – who pushed you when you needed to be pushed, pulled you when you needed to be pulled and hugged you when you needed to be hugged?”

As I looked around the conference table, every one of us raised our hand, and then he said: “How would you do that in church today?” That question is the all important question which will be addressed in the next chapter. But just to underscore how ineffective the typical plan used in churches today is for discipleship, let me share one last example.

Now, many years after that Pastor’s gathering, I have been invited to speak at numerous pastors conferences. In an effort to underscore the need for a different approach to hit our desired target, I lead those pastors in an insightful exercise.

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I first have them collectively create a description of a mature and equipped follower of Christ (before seeing mine). Then I ask them to individually note their church's four or five best offerings to help people in spiritual formation. Their lists typically are very similar including sermons, seminars, classes, Sunday School and small groups.

After asking them to glance at their list of spiritual formation offerings, I ask the all revealing question. "How many of you think that your four or five spiritual formation offerings are effectively taking your people to the destiny of becoming your description of a mature and equipped follower of Christ?" It would not be uncommon to see no hands raised.

Now I am certain that each of those offerings noted by these pastors are helping in their people's spiritual formation. But the reality is, they are experiencing what we had experienced at Perimeter in our early years.

But there is good news. There is a plan that is extremely effective to enable churches to take their people to their desired destiny (maturity and equipping). And its nothing novel. In fact, it is as old as the New Testament and it was modeled by Jesus.

WHAT IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE PLAN FOR MAKING MATURE AND EQUIPPED FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST?

After a week in the mountains seeking the answer to what it would take to make mature and equipped followers of Christ, I came home empty handed. When I met with our elder team to whom I reported, they agreed that my assessment regarding our church was accurate. When asked what the answer was to our dilemma, I had to plead ignorance. I had wracked my brain and had no idea as to the solution. Their response was clear – “We will provide for you whatever resources are needed, but you need to find the answer.”

My involvement with pastors of great churches around the country told me that they were in the same dilemma. I was becoming hopeless to finding an answer until one morning while meeting with our staff. I had once again asked if anyone had any new ideas or thoughts as to where we could go to find a solution.

One of our staff members had an insightful idea. “What if we put the names on a board of all those in our church that we believe meet the description of a mature and equipped follower of Christ? And what if we were to go to them and ask how they got there? Perhaps we would find a common pathway.”

With that suggestion, we started the exercise. After writing names on the board we had a long list of men and women. It was then that someone shared an observation. “Look at how many of the men who are on the list have been in your small group, Randy. Are you doing anything different in your group than we are doing in ours?” In response to the question asked by our staff member, I initially pushed back. After all, I had more experience leading small groups than perhaps any of our members. And for sure, I had more

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theological training. (But I did know that it wasn't that I was working with the "cream of the crop" spiritually. In fact, to a great extent those names on the board who had been in my groups were men I had led to Christ, coming out of moral and relational messes.) And now only a few years later, they were becoming elders and other leaders of our church.

But I knew I was leading my group differently than our other people. I was merely doing with my men what my spiritual mentor had done with me. When our staff asked what I was doing in my group, I gave the five words that outlined the content of my group meeting. These words formed an acronym (TEAMS) which made for easily remembering. Those five words are: Truth, Equipping, Accountability, Mission and Supplication.

In the next chapter, I will explain each of these five ingredients. But for now, let me simply say that the usage of these elements has become the operating system of our discipling ministry, which has given birth to what we call "Life On Life Missional Discipleship".

We define this approach to discipleship as:

"Laboring in the lives of a few with the intention of imparting one's life and God's truth in such a way as to see them become mature and equipped followers of Christ, committed to doing the same in the lives of others."

After embracing this approach to discipleship churchwide, I can now say with full integrity, it is the single greatest decision we have made in the history of our church.

And now after training churches in 20 countries across 6 continents and churches all across America, we can say with confidence, it's not a single church phenomenon. Church after church is giving testimony of the same impact in their church as we have

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experienced at Perimeter Church. So in the next chapter, I will explain the “operating system” of life on life, which we call T.E.A.M.S.

WHAT IS THIS T.E.A.M.S. OPERATING SYSTEM OF LIFE ON LIFE?

Picking up where I left off, of course, as soon as I revealed the five words summarizing my approach to helping the men in my groups with their spiritual formation, they wanted an explanation of each. Though I went into greater detail with them then, I will give you only a brief summary description, however one that will be clarifying all the same.

1) I began with "TRUTH". The difference in what I was doing with my group is that I was giving them truth to study on their own – Bible texts, reading material, verses to memorize, etc., and having them come to group having already searched for the truth, so as to utilize it in our meeting. Our other church small groups had no requirement for outside preparation and therefore, had to use their time together dispensing the truth of God's Word.

2) Next, I explained "EQUIPPING". Equipping is the result of massaging the truth (already learned) until it becomes understandable and usable. This takes place through appropriate question asking, interaction, and modeling.

For instance, my guys will come to group on our third week of the year having spent the week learning from their assignment how to personally worship God. I will have given them the assignment to participate in such worship each day that week. I anxiously await their evaluation regarding how their personal worship had been that week. Their response to how it had been will perhaps best be summarized by the words "pretty good". Then after 20 or so minutes allowing them to observe me having my personal worship during our meeting time, the response will routinely be better described by "wow!" I will then ask,

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“Did you see me do anything differently than you were instructed to do?” After agreeing that I had not, their comments are usually something like, “But now I understand. Now I get it.” They needed to see me doing it.

3) The next word, “ACCOUNTABILITY”, required some explanation because, biblically speaking, it is much different from how the word is used by most today. Most think of accountability as merely asking hard questions and challenging bad behaviors. In reality, that is the description of behaviorism. Christians should be focused on the heart first, watching behavior follow as a result. Biblical accountability may ask hard questions and even challenge bad behavior, but it goes further – it looks for the sin beneath the sin and is uprooted through repentance.

4) The fourth word is “MISSION”. It applies to the commitment to take on the mission of Jesus, both as He preached (Word) and healed (deed). Believers are to do the same. It’s not one or the other, but both. I shared with our staff that to the degree I equipped those men, (whose names were on the board), to live missionally where they live, work and play, to that degree I will predict them hungering for God’s Word and growing to maturity.

5) The last word is “SUPPLICATION”. This simply refers to prayer. I am often asked, “Why not use the word ‘prayer’”? My answer is simple. It’s because TEAMS sounds better than TEAMP! In our group time, we are learning how to pray with each other, for each other, and for all that God’s Word instructs us to pray.

Now the last question remaining to be answered is “What makes TEAMS when partnered with life-on-life such a difference maker?”

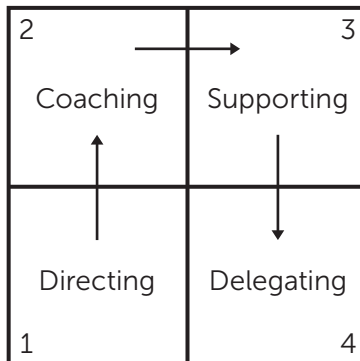
**WHAT MAKES T.E.A.M.S. WITH LIFE ON LIFE RELATIONSHIPS
SUCH A DIFFERENCE MAKER?**

Obviously, during these early years of the church, I was practicing TEAMS (without the use of the acronym). But I had never realized the advantage this approach was having compared to other small groups.

Great insight came to the answer of this question several years later while meeting with the same group of pastors from around the country. This meeting was sponsored by Bob Buford of Leadership Network. Bob had invited us to Colorado to be re-sourced for three days by Ken Blanchard – a noted business leader, author, and years later the head of “Lead Like Jesus”.

When asked by one of the pastors to what he attributed the success of his many books and companies, his reply got our attention. He said, “Oh that’s simple. Every company I build and every book that I write is based on my “situational leadership paradigm.”

Ken then went to a large board and explained as he drew. He put the following on the board.



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He explained it suggesting that when you hire a new employee, you initially have to give “directives” – where your office is, how to use the equipment in the office, how you...when you... etc. He went on to say, “But if you are still giving directives months down the road, you’ve failed as a leader.” He then explained how you must move from directing to coaching. The employee watches you. You watch the employee. You give feedback. The employee asks questions and the employer coaches the newcomer into effectiveness.

Ken explained to us that at some point, its time to be near for “support” but not daily “coaching”. Just being an email or phone call away is important to address that rare and unusual situation that arises. But at some point the leader needs to “delegate” full responsibility to the employee. He or she is now good to go on their own – in fact, qualified to give the same leadership he or she had received to a new employee entering the ranks.

After relating this to the need of the church in helping our members, he made a statement that I will never forget. He said, “Never, never take your church’s people from directive to delegation. Always coach and support them first. Because if you skip coaching and support, you will produce disillusioned learners.” Then he said, “By the way, I know of no organization as notoriously guilty of producing disillusioned learners than the church!” My observation is that this is so true.

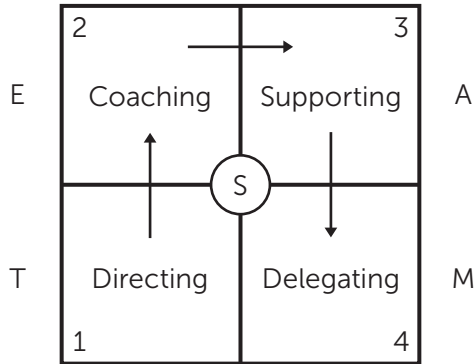
Remember my story of asking pastors at Pastor’s Conferences to write down their four or five best offerings that helped their people in spiritual formation? Check them out – virtually all, if not all, are ministries of “directing”. As important as these are, they are not sufficient without “coaching” and “support”!

Let me now end our story involving Ken Blanchard. By then, we were numerous years into embracing TEAMS at our church. When

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I was listening to Ken speak, and as I observed his presentation of his “situational leadership”, I could now easily answer the question as to why TEAMS used with life on life relationships is such a difference maker.

The diagram below illustrates the answer:



Directing is the same as “Truth”. Coaching is the same as “Equipping”. Support is the same as “Accountability”. And delegating is the same as “Mission”. Just add “Supplication” and you have the operating system for spiritual formation.

I admit that this comparison is not a perfect one. When I overlay our term “mission” over Ken’s term “delegate”, I don’t want to be confusing. Ken uses “delegate” to refer to the last step in training or developing leaders. Life on Life uses “mission” to refer to embracing Jesus’ mission in both word and deed. So in reality, each term in Ken’s leadership paradigm applies to all aspects of learning and development – whether it be the doctrines of suffering, how to personally worship, or how to take on the “mission” of Jesus.

So let me conclude with this summary thought. If you have the right leader (a mature and equipped follower of Christ), who labors

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well in the lives of a few hungry followers (life on life), with a gospel centered, biblically based, well thought through curriculum, and an effective “operating system” like TEAMS, you have a formula for building strong spiritual leaders.

And oh, by the way, this is a description of the ministry of Jesus with his small brotherhood of disciples.

This booklet, companion with the first booklet, “Making Disciples,” was written to give you a brief overview of what Life on Life Ministry means when it describes the process of making and training disciples. Of course, this is only an introduction. There are additional resources and information available at lifeonlife.org, or visit vimeo.com/lolmd/jesus to watch a brief animation about life-on-life missional discipleship.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randy Pope is the founding pastor of Perimeter Church in Johns Creek, Georgia. After 42 years of leading Perimeter Church, in September 2019, he moved into the role of full-time Assistant Pastor of Perimeter Church and President of Life on Life Ministries. He is a graduate of the University of Alabama with a major in math and Reformed Theological Seminary.

Since its start in 1977, Perimeter and its church plants have started more than 40 churches in the Atlanta area. In addition to churches planted both nationally and internationally, Perimeter is a founding partner of Unite!, a group of over 120 churches from different denominations working together to bring Kingdom transformation to the city of Atlanta.

His personal passion and commitment is to make and train disciples of Christ. He founded Life on Life Ministries, an organization committed to establishing life-on-life missional discipleship in churches worldwide. In addition to training church leaders throughout the world, he has been a guest lecturer at numerous universities and graduate schools. He has written books specifically for pastors and leaders, *The Intentional Church* and *Insourcing*. He has also written a book for singles, *Finding Your Million Dollar Mate*. He has developed resources used around the world that include: *The Journey*, a gospel centered resource for discipleship and *Express Your Faith*, a relational way to help others investigate Christ. He has also developed resources for those exploring Christianity that include *Life Issues* and *Next Steps* booklets. For other resources and works from Randy Pope, visit LifeonLife.org.

Randy and Carol have four grown children and fifteen grandchildren.

ABOUT LIFE ON LIFE

Pastors around the world have shared with us that there is a leadership and influence gap between their church and the community in which they live. There are not enough leaders for the ministries of the church, much less to be salt and light in the community.

At Perimeter Church, life-on-life discipleship is the way that we are developing spiritual maturity in the lives of our people. For years, Perimeter was recognized for growth and innovation, but we realized that there was something missing – taking people to a level of maturity in their faith.

The church realized that life-on-life discipleship had been at the core of our leadership development, but it was not the culture of the church. It was not a movement. As we began to apply the principles of Jesus' model of discipleship to shape the culture of discipleship in the church, we saw a new level of spiritual depth develop amongst our people.

Life on Life Ministries was founded out of Perimeter to help other churches follow Jesus' model of discipleship and to begin broader movements of discipleship in cities and nations around the world through the local church.

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The term “discipleship” is not found in Scripture. However, the word “disciple” is often used. It simply means “follower.” Though the word “discipleship” means different things among Christians, at Life on Life, we see discipleship as a process with two distinct focuses: the “making” and the “training” of disciples. Discipleship is anything that helps someone follow Jesus, whether that is moving them from unbelief to belief and/or belief to maturity.

In conversations with pastors around the world, there is a shared frustration with failed ministry models and a longing for hearts and lives to be changed. In this brief booklet, Randy Pope tells the story of how Life on Life discipleship began at Perimeter Church. He introduces T.E.A.M.S., the operating system for Life on Life. T.E.A.M.S., coupled with life-on-life relationships, has proven to be a difference-maker. Over the years, there have been many men and women who have become mature and equipped followers of Christ. There is no better time than now to bring life-on-life discipleship back to the local church.



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